

REMARKS

In an Office Action dated December 23, 2005, the Examiner (1) rejects Claim 1 under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Arakawa et al. (U.S. Patent No. 4,944,229); (2) rejects Claims 2-9 and 11 under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Arakawa et al. in view of Kyotani et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,839,567); and (3) objects to Claim 10 as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but indicates it would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. By this response, Applicants amend Claims 1, 2, and 10, cancel Claims 12-21, and add new Claims 22-28.

The Examiner rejected Claim 1 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 4,944,229 to Arakawa et al. The Examiner stated that Arakawa shows a manufacturing operation that includes a plurality of platforms each having independently controllable and steerable drive assemblies. The Examiner stated that in operation the platforms are moved through a production area with adjacent platforms spaced from one another at a second distance and when the platforms get out of order they are removed from the production area to what may be considered a delivery area where they are moved freely independently of the track so that they are spaced apart from each other at a first distance that is greater than the second distance under normal operating conditions.

Applicants respectfully disagree with the Examiner's rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b). Applicants respectfully submit that Arakawa does not include an independently controllable and steerable drive assembly. In Arakawa the drive assembly is not independently steerable. Arakawa requires the use of a U-shaped track with a guide rail installed in a pit to which the guide member engages the guide rail to steer the vehicle. Furthermore, in column 8, lines 50-65, when the carrier is desired to be removed from the track, the guide member 19 is separated from the steering frame and then the driving wheel is lifted off by lifting the movable frames and an engagement member is separated from the link chain. Only with removing all of these items is the conveying carrier in a position to be removed freely. Therefore, Arakawa does not include an independently controllable and steerable drive assembly. Applicants have

further amended Claim 1 to include a controller which is capable of steering the drive assembly. Applicants respectfully submit that in regards to Claim 1, Arakawa does not disclose, teach, or suggest a controller capable of steering the drive assembly.

The Examiner rejected Claims 2-9 and 11 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Arakawa in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,839,567 to Kyotani et al. The Examiner uses Kyotani to show a manufacturing operation with a plurality of platforms that are locked together to maintain a zero gap between adjacent platforms in a production area. Applicants respectfully submit that Kyotani does not supplement the deficiencies of Arakawa in regards to amended Claim 1. Kyotani does not include a controller capable of steering said drive assembly as required by Claim 1 and the claims depending thereupon include additional limitations that further define over the cited references. Applicants respectfully submit that the Examiner's rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) is overcome and that Claims 1-9 and 11 are in a condition for allowance.

Applicants thank the Examiner for his statement that Claim 10 as being allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. Applicants have rewritten Claim 10 as suggested by the Examiner in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims and therefore submit that Claim 10 is in a condition for allowance.

Applicants have added new Claims 22-28, which further define and claim the invention. In regards to Claim 22, the cited references do not disclose, teach or suggest a controller capable of moving a platform relative to adjacent platforms. Claims 23 and 24 depending from Claim 22 provide additional limitations that further define over the cited references. Claims 25-27 include additional limitations that further define Claim 1 and therefore are further allowable over the cited references. In regards to Claim 28, the cited references do not disclose, teach or suggest a central controller communicating with the drive assemblies to control the velocity and direction of each platform.

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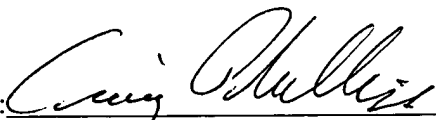
Applicants respectfully submit that Claims 1-11 and 22-28 are in a condition for allowance. If the Examiner believes that personal communication would expedite the prosecution of this application, please telephone the undersigned at (248) 433-7231.

Prompt and favorable consideration and allowance of this application is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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Enclosures

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